

INCIDENTS IN THE POLITICAL CAREER

OF THE LATE

SIR JOHN THOMPSON

NOT CONTAINED IN

MR. J. CASTELL HOPKINS' BOOK,

BY

SENATOR MILLER.

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1895
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The EDITH *and* LORNE PIERCE
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Queen's University at Kingston

MR. HOPKINS' BOOK.

In Mr. J. Castell Hopkins' book recently published, entitled "Life and Work of the late Sir John Thompson," there appears the following extract from a letter of Bishop Cameron, of Antigonish, in reference to the early events of the late Premier's public life, at page 56 :

"Towards the end of October, 1877, I was convalescing after a serious attack of illness, when one day I received a friendly visit from Senator Miller. A by-election was soon to take place in Antigonish. In that connection the Senator said : 'What do you think of the idea of inviting Mr. J. S. D. Thompson to become a candidate?' My reply was as follows : 'I should be delighted to see my native county represented by a man of Thompson's standing and ability.' Upon being asked whether Miller would be allowed to make use of the above expression, I readily replied that my words were the honest expression of my views, and that I was not ashamed of their being known to all whom they might concern." The Bishop then goes on to say that he resided at that time in Arichat, and did not visit any part of Antigonish county during the campaign that ensued."

The above quotation, marked as it is by genuine modesty and courtesy, sounds well enough, but as it is very misleading, I have concluded to compile these pages, containing a statement of facts known to very few ; facts, however, which belong to the political history of our country, and should therefore be known to all, and especially to every one interested in the subject of Mr. Hopkins' biography.

HOW SIR JOHN THOMPSON'S POLITICAL CAREER COMMENCED.

I cannot better illustrate the manner in which Mr. J. S. D. Thompson began his political career than by giving the following letter from the Hon. James McDonald, now Chief Justice of Nova Scotia, but in 1877 local leader of the Conservative Party in that Province, Sir Charles Tupper having taken up his residence in Toronto after the defeat of Sir John McDonald's government in 1873 :—

HALIFAX. N.S., 25th Sept., 1877.

MY DEAR MILLER,

In view of a local dissolution this fall, it is very important, I think, that John S. D. Thompson should have a seat in the new House. This I think desirable for many reasons, but more especially for *the* reason that we sadly need a few men of determination and ability there. It is manifest that the men now leading the Opposition need to be strengthened to enable them to command that public confidence which will ensure success. Mr. Thompson, I need not tell you, would be a valuable acquisition, but he must be returned by a Catholic constituency. There are three or four of these in the eastern part of the Province, with all of which you are well acquainted, and have large influence. Can you not manage in some way to secure Thompson's return? If there be a local election this fall, I need not tell you, it is most important, if not essential to success next summer, that we shall get a majority of the New House of Assembly.

Let me hear from you and oblige,

Yours truly,

(Sgd) JAS McDONALD.

TO HON. W. MILLER.

P.S.—This is written without Thompson's knowledge or consent.

On the receipt of the foregoing letter, I concluded to call on Bishop Cameron, then residing at Arichat, and without showing him Mr. McDonald's communication or saying anything to him about it, obtain his opinion on the subject to which it referred. I was pleased to find, as I anticipated, that his Lordship was warmly in favor of getting a seat in the House of Assembly for Mr. Thompson. There happened at the moment to be a vacant seat in the Catholic County of Antigonish, caused by the resignation of one of the local members, the late Mr. J. J. McKinnon. I suggested to the Bishop that he should use his influence to get a requisition to Mr. Thompson to stand for the vacancy. His Lordship approved of my suggestion, but said he was too sick, (the Bishop was seriously ill at the time) to take an active part in the business himself, but requested me to write to his friend, the Rev. R. McDonald, then P. P. of Pictou, now Bishop of Harbor Grace, N.F., a native of Antigonish, and very popular there; explain to him his Lordship's views, and ask him to go to the shire town of the constituency and secure the desired requisition. I accordingly wrote

Father McDonald, stating the Bishop's views, and urging on every ground that presented itself to my mind the wisdom of securing the vacant seat in Antigonish for Mr. Thompson. I duly received the following reply from the Rev. gentleman:—

“ PICTOU, NOVA SCOTIA, Oct. 6th, 1877.

DEAR SIR,

I am this moment in receipt of your esteemed favor of the 1st inst. I am pained to think that our good Bishop has been seriously ill. I pray and hope that he shall soon be himself again.

* * * * *

As to the second count of your able letter, I am, I assure you, perfectly at one with yourself. There are few men for whom I have a greater love and esteem than for Mr. J. S. D. Thompson. In public life he certainly would do honor to himself, and reflect credit on the Catholics of the Dominion. There is no county, need I tell you, which I should rather have the honor of such a representative than our own native county, Antigonish.

The problem to be solved, it seems to me, is not how to have him elected for that county, but how to have him elected without opposition. A county which at this moment feels itself for the first time emancipated from the political oligarchy of a quarter of a century must be handled with much delicacy. In fact to avoid recurrence of the bitter political enmities of the past, the lay element must take, or must be convinced that they are taking, the initiative in the matter. Permit me to suggest the scheme by which this can be most easily accomplished.

1. *Keeping politics entirely out of sight*, let Mr Thompson be invited to repeat his lecture on the “German Persecutions” in Antigonish before the public and college.

2. Let a simultaneous meeting (informal) of the College Board be convened.

3. After the lecture, let the clergy and leading laymen be quietly operated on to offer Mr. Thompson a requisition to stand for the county.

I feel confident the lecture will enlist the sympathy of all Catholics in favor of the young and talented convert. We could get Father Gerroir, as senior member of the Board, to act as chairman of the lecture *against Germany*. If Father Gerroir take kindly to Mr. Thompson, I believe he will be elected by acclamation. Something at all events must be done to bring the merits and claims of Mr. Thompson before the people of Antigonish before he gets a requisition. If this plan recommend itself to His Lordship and yourself, I shall attend to *the details*.

With sentiments of esteem,

I have the honor to remain,

Sincerely yours,

(sgd) R. McDONALD,

HON. W. MILLER,

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This letter was sent by me to Bishop Cameron, who returned it with an endorsement in his own handwriting as follows :—" All right. BP. CAMERON."

On the receipt of Hon. James McDonald's letter, I sent him a reply, assuring him of my willingness to do all in my power to promote Mr. Thompson's interests, (besides dealing with other matters) ; but getting no answer, I wrote him a little sharply another note, relating how far progress had been made in enlisting the services of Father McDonald, and shortly after, I received the following letter from Mr. Thompson :—

HALIFAX, 15th October, 1877.

MY DEAR SIR,

On Saturday Mr. McDonald placed your letters in my hands disclosing a little conspiracy for the subjugation of Antigonish. I have thought about the matter carefully since then, and have concluded to place my views fully before you, first, however, giving to you and to Bishop Cameron, as well as to our friend and co-conspirator in Pictou my warmest thanks for the interest you have all taken in a matter of such great importance to me. Saturday's *Chronicle* announced that Mr. Joseph McDonald had taken the field—so one of the plans of the campaign—an unopposed election—must be considered out of the question. From the extract you gave from Father McDonald's letter I see clearly what the difficulty would be in the way of the clergy taking the initiative, and the active part of promoting my candidature. I quite appreciate that difficulty, and probably the plan which Father McDonald suggested was the only one that could be devised for surmounting it. I have a little doubt, however, as to the efficacy of even that arrangement.

* * * * *

Considering the difficulty then which Father McDonald suggests—the absence of any means surmounting it at so short a notice, and the very great disadvantage which a stranger must be at in competing with one known and living in the country, I would suggest whether it would not be better to let me stand back for this election, and to run somebody else whose return will be safe, and who can be depended on to oppose the present wretched Government. You will quite understand, that one, like myself, naturally ambitious, and whose hopes have been excited by so gratifying a prospect as the nomination which you contemplated, might be reluctant to lose this opportunity, but I think that under the circumstances it would be decidedly best to let it pass. Should you and his lordship continue to hold the view that I should aspire to the seat, I can avail myself very soon of chances to become known to the people of the

county. Perhaps you will do me the favor to advise me as to your views on these points, and, if you think well, to communicate mine to his lordship.

Meantime, with many thanks,

I remain, yours, etc.,

(sgd) JNO. S. D. THOMPSON."

The Hon'ble W. Miller.

I did not communicate this discouraging letter to Bishop Cameron or Father McDonald, but applied myself to the task as well as I knew how of bringing about a change in the writer's views, in which, as the following letter from Mr. Thompson will show, I was successful:—

" HALIFAX, 29th Oct., 1877.

MY DEAR SIR,

Your letter of the 23rd has just been received, and is very gratifying indeed. The arguments contained in yours of the 18th were quite convincing, and since my telegram, I have not modified my resolution to go ahead, let the consequences be what they may. Your last letter removed all apprehensions of defeat, but even if defeat were certain, I am quite ready for the contest, if my friends and the party think (as they do) that I should go ahead. The future movements I leave entirely in the hands of his lordship and yourself, and my other friends, holding myself in readiness to obey at any time. If you have any suggestions to make, I will be glad to have them; until they come, I presume, I am to remain passive.

If this matter should result in my getting into public life, I sincerely hope that I shall be able to prove to Bishop Cameron that his trust has not been misplaced, although his opinion of my capacity may have been too high. You are aware that nearly all the difficulties with which Catholics have had to contend in matters of local legislation, (education, for example,) have come from members of our party. That is the great cause of our being unable to carry sufficient Catholic support to make the seats in Halifax secure. I flatter myself if I obtain a seat in the House I can effect a considerable change in that respect, and the obligation to do so, I shall regard as more sacred than any other. The promises of a candidate do not count for much, but if I get the opportunity, I will make mine good.

With renewed thanks to Bishop Cameron and yourself,

I remain, yours etc.,

(sgd) JNO. S. D. THOMPSON.

The Hon'ble W. Miller.

About a week after the date of the above communication, Bishop Cameron's health having become all right again, he wrote a somewhat

authoritative letter to Father Gillis, of Antigonish, a man of great local influence, to be used in the county, giving his reasons for supporting Mr. Thompson's candidature. His lordship sent his letter to me on its way to the post office unsealed, with the following note :—

“ARICHAT, Tuesday afternoon.

MY DEAR SIR,

Be pleased to glance over my letter to Father Gillis. It has been written amid many distractions, but I think it covers the ground sufficiently to show my advocacy of Thompson, and my reasons therefor.

Yours faithfully,

(sgd) † JOHN CAMERON.

P.S.—I have had no time to take a copy of the letter.”

It is needless to say the letter, (of which I did not fail to take a copy,) was clear and to the point, but it failed to effect the purpose for which it was intended, as the sequel will show.

A day or two after the Bishop's messenger had called on me, I received the following letter from the Hon. James McDonald :—

“HALIFAX, 23rd Oct., 1877.

MY DEAR MILLER,

I am afraid I deserve the scalping administered in yours of the 17th inst., although I did not really intend to be disrespectful or negligent. The truth is I have been running about so much lately, and so occupied in Rigby's absence, that I had forgotten I had not written to you, although the subject of our correspondence was constantly present to my mind. The most severe portion of your letter was the supposition that conscientious scruples had intervened. Let us only secure Thompson's return, and I shall have no difficulty with my Presbyterian conscience.

You have managed the whole business admirably, and have thereby imposed another obligation on your political friends. Your last letter settled any scruples that Thompson may have had and he informed me yesterday that he had telegraphed you that he was ready whenever you gave the word. I know no one more admirably fitted to manage a matter of the kind than Father McDonald, and I look to an election by acclamation, but I think no time should now be lost. Thompson's candidature is now talked of openly, and the longer definite operations are delayed, the more likely will trouble arise. It is becoming every day more important to have Thompson in the local House this session. * * *

Yours truly,

(Sgd) JAS. McDONALD.

Hon. Senator Miller

Upon receiving my reply to his letter of the 6th Oct., Father McDonald proceeded to Antigonish to arrange "the details" of a requisition to Thompson, but the attempt proved a complete failure. The village "coterie," as he termed the leading politicians of the shire town, were all adverse to the bringing in of a stranger to represent the county. Father McDonald eventually wrote me that he thought it better that Thompson should stand aside till the general election next year. I considered this would be a fatal mistake, and sent him my views in the following communication:—

"ARICHAT, Oct. 26th, 1877.

REV. DEAR SIR,

I hope you will not weary of my correspondence, but your last letter asks for an answer to the proposition it contains.

I wrote you the other day that in a conversation I lately had with the Bishop respecting Mr. Thompson's candidature in Antigonish, his Lordship was of opinion that our friend should contest the present vacancy "win or lose." Neither Bishop Cameron nor Mr. Thompson will suffer any loss of mental peace, or diminution of prestige, from defeat in a good cause if it must come. Such a result would be the best preparation for certain victory next year.

Besides, it is clear now that whenever Thompson is brought into the county the local "coterie" will give him opposition, and—if I can see into the future with any accuracy at all—the chances of defeating him as a new man next year will be better than at present. If Thompson be frightened out of the field now, the "coterie" will be emboldened by their success, and will be stimulated by a sense of danger to greater activity in the coming year. With the patronage of two governments at their disposal (and I need not say that the Federal as well as the local government will spare no effort to destroy Thompson politically), and with all the means for combination and intrigue, which the local wire-pullers so well understand how to use, in their hands—if Thompson retire now he will have a more formidable task before him a year after this than he has to-day. But suppose he does retire, who in the meantime will be working *for* him in the county as his opponents will be working *against* him? Who will then be taking the active, zealous, persistent personal interest in his behalf that "the coterie" and its ramifications will be constantly exerting, in season and out of season, to destroy his prospects? No one! No one will make himself an aggressive champion of his interests during the intervening time, who is not willing to make an exertion to secure his election now, when a short, sharp and earnest struggle will put an end to all present and *future* difficulty. I repeat, from what you say of the local "coterie," a hard fight at the outset will be inevitable, but there will be only one

such fight, if the matter be now taken properly in hand. Fully appreciating all the disadvantages under which our candidate labors, I yet believe it will be safer to have the fight this year than next."

* * * * *

"I am sorry therefore, I cannot agree with you in asking Mr. Thompson to postpone his candidature till next year, but my opinion may be worth nothing; it certainly would be worthless, if I did not give it to you frankly, whether agreeing with your own or not.

Believe me,

My dear sir,

Yours most sincerely,

REV. R. McDONALD, P.P.

(Sgd) WM. MILLER.

Pictou, N.S.

I now concluded that there was only one course open to Mr. Thompson in the absence of a requisition, and that was to come boldly into the county at once; declare himself a candidate, and enter upon his canvass without further delay. Besides, I had a note from Bishop Cameron about this time in which his lordship said:—"You are the best judge as to what Mr. Thompson ought to be doing, and how soon ought he to show himself among his constituents, (*sic*)."

I sent Father McDonald's letter and my reply to Hon. James McDonald, and asked his opinion of the course I had resolved to adopt. This was his answer:—

"HALIFAX, N.S., 30th Oct., 1877.

MY DEAR MILLER,

I return herewith the letters as requested. I entirely concur with you as to the course to be pursued, and have told Thompson so, but I did not let him know that Father McDonald felt a little faint-hearted. Thompson has finally resolved to be guided entirely by his lordship Bishop Cameron and yourself, equally ready for fight or retreat as you may advise.

* * *

Yours very truly,

(Sgd) JAS McDONALD.

Hon. W. Miller.

After some delay, Mr. Thompson came to Antigonish, accompanied by his intimate friend, Mr. J. J. Stewart, editor and proprietor of the *Halifax Herald*, the leading Conservative organ in Nova Scotia. This

gentleman's brother, Mr. Douglas Stewart, afterwards became Sir John Thompson's private secretary, and his brother-in-law, the present Judge Sedgewick, his deputy in the ministry of Justice. Mr. Stewart was the ruling spirit among Sir John Thompson's Halifax friends mentioned in Mr. Hopkins' book, although there is only one faint reference made to him at the tail of the list. Yet in ability, influence and management the quiet and unobtrusive editor was equal to all the others put together, and was so regarded by Sir John. He was in reality, while by no means forgetting himself, as the public accounts amply show, the powerful benefactor of his kith and kin—some of whom it will be admitted are pretty well "fixed." In that list there are the names of some men who have managed to get themselves into absurd prominence in connection with the career of the late Premier. I mention these particulars regarding Mr. J. J. Stewart, because his name will appear further on in very confidential relations with Judge Thompson. On the day of Mr. Thompson's arrival at Antigonish I received the following telegram from him:—

ANTIGONISH, 21st Nov., 1877.

TO HON. W. MILLER,

Arrived to-day. Saw McGillivray, McIsaac and our friends. McGillivray persists in running and has secured signatures of our party here. His friends boast they can elect him against all influence. No information as to feeling outside, but will ascertain. Letter to-night.

(sgd) J. S. D. THOMPSON.

The day after the receipt of the foregoing telegram, I received the following letter from Mr. Thompson:—

ANTIGONISH, 21st Nov., 1877.

MY DEAR SIR,

Holmes, Stewart and I arrived here this morning, and find the situation bad. McGillivray's card is out as an independent. The Bishop's letters have not made him flinch in his resolution to run. * * * *

It appears that McG. is very strong, and while we are showing a bold front, and declaring my intention to run, so as to bluff rather than be bluffed, I do not really see the propriety of running—incurring the loss of time, labor and money of a contest without any gain either personally or for the party. I fear that the clergy will be asked to use their influence on the losing side, and that we shall thus lose the best hold we have on the county. * * * *

Father Gillis is very kind and regrets the situation, but can see no hope. Of course,

I will stick to the war if ordered, but should much prefer being ordered to fall back, and come to the scratch some other time. Bishop Cameron has been so very kind, and his letters which I saw here were so flattering, and at the same time showed so fully, that his lordship was pained at the turn which affairs had taken, I thought it my duty to write the enclosed letter, which please read and deliver, unless you decidedly disapprove of its tenor.

Yours, etc.,

(sgd) J. S. D. THOMPSON.

Hon. W. Miller.

The letter enclosed to me for the Bishop was a strong plea to allow the writer to retire from a hopeless contest. I "decidedly disapproved of its tenor," and did not therefore, deliver it. Had I done otherwise, the contest instead of ending, as it did, in a splendid victory, would undoubtedly have come to a sudden and inglorious termination.

On the same day that Thompson's letter came to hand Bishop Cameron received an equally discouraging telegram from Father Gillis, declaring opposition to Mr. McGillivray useless, which his lordship sent to me with the following note :—

SATURDAY morning,

MY DEAR SIR,

I enclose telegram. What should be the reply? Give your opinion at once if possible. I don't see my way. Of course, McGillivray is infinitely preferable to Joe, and the strongest man in the county.

Yours faithfully,

(sgd) † J. CAMERON.

I now realized that we were indeed in a dangerous crisis; that Thompson wanted to retire; that the Bishop as well as Father McDonald had become "faint-hearted"; and that he evidently feared to run Thompson against McGillivray. If Thompson had known that there was any wavering on the part of Bishop Cameron and Father McDonald, he would have retired from the contest at once; but as the medium of communication between the three gentlemen, I had the opportunity of preventing either from fully knowing the "faint-heartedness" of the others, and thus found it more easy to put back-bone into them all, and keep up their courage for the fight. One adverse word from me then would, in all probability, have relegated young Thompson to political obscurity forever.

I immediately wrote the Bishop pretty much on the same lines I had used in my letter to Father McDonald, and called on him during the day, when we fully discussed the situation. I told his lordship that with Mr. Thompson canvassing the county, there was no way of honorable retreat, but suggested a way by which victory, I thought, could be easily achieved. I played my last card, which all along I had held in reserve. I advised a change of tactics, and my advice was taken, but not without some hesitation, and even reluctance. Another letter was written to Father Gillis by his lordship to be read to McGillivray. This communication was in the nature of a personal appeal to the latter to retire from the contest, which I felt sure Mr. McGillivray's amiable disposition would be unable to resist; in other words, stones having failed, I persuaded the bishop, it would be good politics to reverse the fable, and try what virtue there was in grass. The letter was sent to me by the Bishop, unsealed, with a slip of paper containing the following words:—

“If you think there is anything else I ought to say, let me know and I will add it.”

My arguments had not to be thrown away on his lordship; the letter required nothing additional, and I felt satisfied it would do its work.

A few days afterwards, on the morning of Nomination Day, a telegram came to Bishop Cameron from Father Gillis, saying that he had read his lordship's letter to Mr. McGillivray, who had asked time to consider it. An hour later, another telegram from and to the same parties contained the gratifying intelligence that—

“McGillivray has retired from the contest.”

I felt relieved. My predictions to the Bishop had been realized. Victory was already won, as the fight with “JOE,” the remaining candidate, could hardly be considered a serious affair.

When I got the returns on election day which showed Thompson's success with a very large majority (over 500) I called to see Bishop Cameron, and found him in the drawing-room of the Notre Dame Convent surrounded by half a dozen of the ladies of the institution, anxiously awaiting the news from Antigonish. Upon telling them the

result of the election, they were all much pleased. Then the Bishop, addressing me, said with emphasis—"Well, if Thompson is elected he may thank you for it."

It is highly probable, that if Thompson had been driven out of Antigonish at that time, he would never afterwards have got a foot-hold in the county; his chances of election elsewhere then, were more hopeless still; he would have become disgusted with politics; and the world would never have known his subsequent brilliant public career, which owes so much to my fidelity and firmness at that critical moment.

I have not quoted a tithe of the letters which the contest elicited, but only such portions of them as I consider unobjectionable; yet none of them were marked private or confidential.

II.

SIR JOHN THOMPSON ENTERS THE DOMINION CABINET.

I now come to Mr. Thompson's (or rather Judge Thompson's) second entrance into public life. In 1882 he had become leader of the local government, and about two months afterwards his party was defeated at the polls, when he accepted a seat, on the Supreme Court Bench of Nova Scotia where he remained until the autumn of 1885. In May, 1884, Sir Charles Tupper resigned his seat in the Federal Cabinet to assume the duties of Canadian High Commissioner in London. And here I may reveal "an item of political history" concerning myself, not known to many, as it had a vital bearing on Thompson's future. I was at the time Speaker of the Senate. I had reason to know that Sir Charles was of opinion that my political services, especially my services and sacrifices in connection with the Union of the Provinces, as well as my earnest and unwavering support after the Union, regardless of momentary unpopularity or sectional clamor, of every great measure of public policy, whether to enlarge, unify or strengthen the Dominion and make Confederation a success (not to speak of my general party services,) entitled me to a seat in the Cabinet. When I returned to Halifax after the session of 1884, I was approached by one of Sir Charles' confidential friends, who told me the High Commissioner was very anxious to see me before he left the Dominion.

This gentleman also informed me that a banquet was to be given to Sir Charles at Amherst before his departure, and that an invitation would be sent to me, if I could promise to attend. I replied that I could not conveniently accept the invitation, but as I was making preparations to sail in a fortnight for England, I would see the High Commissioner as soon as I got to London. Accordingly, a day or two after my arrival in the great metropolis, I called on Sir Charles, who invited me to dine with him on the following day, adding that he wanted very much to have a talk with me. I, of course, accepted the invitation, and after dinner my host took me to his library. We were not long there before Sir Charles abruptly came to the point by asking me the following question :—" Miller, did Sir John say anything to you before you left Ottawa, about your entering the Cabinet ?" I answered, that he did not. " Well," said Sir Charles, " I will tell you what occurred when I handed the Premier my resignation. He asked me whom I would recommend as my successor, and I had no hesitation in giving your name, and my reasons for doing so. He inquired if I had spoken to my colleague, Mr. McLellan, on the subject, and I replied that I had not. He told me to do so and let him know the result. I sent for McLellan the same day, and informed him of what had taken place between Sir John and myself. I found McLellan strongly opposed to my views. I repeated to him the arguments I had used with Sir John McDonald, and requested him to think them over, and let me know his decision the next day. Much to my surprise," said Sir Charles, " McLellan came back early on the morning following, and assured me, that upon reflection, he was thoroughly in accord with my views. I communicated the result to the Prime Minister, and when I left Ottawa I thought the matter settled."

The fact was that McLellan had designedly deceived Sir Charles on his second visit to him. The tricky Minister knew that if he and the veteran statesman should come to a fight over my appointment, while the latter was in the country, the result would not be doubtful. McLellan had therefore made up his mind to conceal his hostility and wait till Sir Charles left Canada, when he would be master of the situation, with no one to frustrate his wishes—to declare himself opposed to my appointment, which he no doubt did, and successfully, as Sir John

never mentioned the subject to me, nor did I ever speak to him about it, because I preferred my position as Speaker of the Senate, untrammelled by Cabinet cares, and used every argument I could think of to persuade the High Commissioner that I was not at that time the right man for the vacancy. However, Sir Charles extracted a promise from me, that if offered a seat in the Cabinet on my return to Canada, I would not refuse it ; but with the understanding that I would make no effort to obtain it.

I mentioned the foregoing circumstances to show that the frustration of what many might consider a not unreasonable ambition on my part, contributed, as I have already intimated, to the making of Thompson's future, for if Sir Charles Tupper's wishes in regard to my promotion had been achieved there would have been no place for the Judge in the Cabinet, and the late Premier would never have had an opportunity to act his distinguished *role* in Dominion politics.

In the beginning of the year 1885, an event transpired which had an important bearing on Judge Thompson's career. That event was the death of Stewart Campbell, County Court Judge for the District of Antigonish, Guysboro' and Inverness. There were several applicants for the vacant judgeship, among the number, Mr. H. H. Bligh, who had the active support of Mr. (now Sir) C. H. Tupper, and other influential members of the House of Commons, Parliament being then in session. Some time before this, I was aware of an attempt to induce Judge Thompson to leave the Bench to take Nova Scotia's empty seat in the Cabinet, with the portfolio of Justice. I had been applied to by several Roman Catholic barristers in eastern Nova Scotia, all well qualified for the position, but all opposed to the Government, to use my influence to get them the vacant County Court Judgeship, and I believed one of them ought to get it. I consequently called on Sir John McDonald, and gave him my opinion on the subject. I told him that Mr. McKenzie's Government had given great offence when appointing the seven County Court Judges for Nova Scotia in 1876, because there was no Roman Catholic among the number, although the vacant district, as well as the adjoining district of Cape Breton, contained a majority of Roman Catholics, chiefly Scotch. I urged that it would be good policy, as well as an act of justice, to put a Scotch

Catholic in Judge Campbell's place and suggested the name of Mr. Angus McIsaac, M.P., for Antigonish, who, I knew, would take the Judgeship, if offered to him. I expressed my belief that the Government could redeem the county of Antigonish, if it were opened under such circumstances, and, I added, if Judge Thompson should decide to leave the Bench for public life, he would have the very constituency at his command that he would desire. Sir John thanked me warmly for the information I gave him, and said he would not fail to bear it in mind. Immediately after my interview with the Premier, the agitation in favor of Mr. Bligh was dropped significantly. I believe if I had not intervened when I did, (in fact, I *knew* it) Mr. Bligh would have got the Judgeship, and Judge Thompson in all probability would never have been induced to try a new constituency to enter the House of Commons, in view of the signal defeat of his Government in 1882 in every Catholic constituency in the province, except Antigonish, where he was elected with McGillivray as his colleague, but as an opponent of his Government.

In the summer of 1885, while travelling from Halifax to Cape Breton, I met the present Prime Minister, Hon. (now Sir) McKenzie Bowell, who with his family was on their way to P. E. I. on a holiday outing; and I took advantage of our meeting to urge on him the wisdom of getting Judge Thompson to join the Administration. Affairs were in this condition when I received the following letter from Mr. J. J. Stewart, already mentioned, who was Mr. Thompson's right hand man in all his Provincial elections in Antigonish.

"OFFICE OF

THE MORNING HERALD

PRINTING AND PUBLISHING COMPANY,

HALIFAX, N.S., 23rd Aug., 1885.

MY DEAR MILLER,

You are, as I know, fully aware of the negotiations that have been going on with the view of having Judge Thompson enter the Dominion Government as Minister of Justice. and I am also aware of your hearty concurrence in the proposal—being, as I am led to believe, one of the first to propose such a solution of our difficulties. At first, as you are aware, our friend the Judge was inclined to refuse the invitation. He even went so far some weeks ago as to write to Sir John that he could not entertain any such offer if made. But of late he has begun to look upon the matter much

more favorably, and Sir John learning of the change in his opinions, wrote him, giving him until the first prox. to decide. This leaves him as you will see, just one week more. I spent this evening with him, and we talked the matter all over, and at last he gave me a definite promise that he would accept, if two preliminaries were arranged."

* * * * *

"Both the Judge and myself think that, of all men in the world, you are the man to do the work, if you will undertake it, and at his suggestion, I now take the liberty of asking you to undertake the mission, which as you say, must be entered forthwith."

* * * * *

With these and other arguments that a skilled diplomatist like yourself will readily call to mind, I think you will be able to secure all that is wanted, and I need not impress on you how much depends on your success. You know probably better than any other man the importance to the party, to the Province, and to the whole country, of securing a man like Judge Thompson at the present time for Minister of Justice, and at the same time capturing a county from the enemy. Its first effect will undoubtedly be to decide the contest in St. John, where all depends on the Catholic vote. Its ultimate effects you can appreciate much better than I can.

* * * * *

With kindest regards and best hopes for result,

I am, truly yours,

(sgd) J. J. STEWART."

Hon. Wm. Miller,

Arichat.

About a month after this letter was written, Judge Thompson left the Bench; was sworn of the Privy Council; and became Minister of Justice. The above letter of Mr. Stewart is marked "private and strictly confidential," and I therefore only give such portions of it as reveal no confidence; but the document belongs to history, and history shall have it at the proper time; because it sheds a flood of light on the methods and merits of Sir John Thompson.

I leave the reader to say, after a perusal of the foregoing pages, how far I was a factor, in bringing the late Sir John Thompson into the service of the state, both in the Provincial Legislature and Federal Parliament, and the necessarily larger arena of public life in which his fine talents were displayed.

III.

SIR JOHN BECOMES PREMIER.

On the death of Sir John MacDonald, I was one of those who thought Sir John Thompson acted wisely, when asked to form a government, in recommending the late Mr. Abbott (afterwards Sir John Abbott) for the Premiership, because in so prominent a position as that of Prime Minister, he was sure to be the object of much intolerant and bitter hostility, on account of the change in his religious views ; and when the vacancy occurred in the Chief Justiceship of Canada by the death of Sir William Ritchie, I then thought it would have been better for both his party and himself, had he taken the vacant seat on the Bench of the Supreme Court, for which he was so admirably qualified, I know too that this was his own conviction, but he said he felt it his duty to stand by his party friends so long as they desired him to do so, no matter what personal sacrifice it might entail. He discussed the question with me more than once in anything but a cheerful mood and I clearly discerned on one occasion from an expression that dropped from him that he feared to leave himself open a second time to the charge of abandoning his party in an emergency for a safe refuge on the Bench. When called on to form a government on the retirement of Sir John Abbott, he asked me for my views on the re-construction of the Cabinet, so far as the Senate was concerned. Perhaps I was the only Senator outside the Ministry to whom he paid this compliment. But I had frequently spoken to him respecting the unfair treatment of the Upper Chamber by Sir John MacDonald, in regard to Cabinet representation, always pointing out that I could have no personal interest to subserve in advocating the rights of the Senate, as Nova Scotia had its full contingent in the Administration, and there was therefore, no room for anybody else from that Province. I always urged on Sir John Thompson, both on constitutional and party grounds, the justice and wisdom of placing at least three portfolios in the Senate ; that is, one from Ontario ; one from Quebec ; and one from the smaller provinces, either from the east or west, as circumstances might render advisable. After the reconstruction I received from him the following letter : —

" OFFICE OF THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE,

OTTAWA, 12th Jan., 1893.

MY DEAR SENATOR,

I read with great interest your last letter and beg to thank you for the care with which you discussed the question of reconstruction—from the point of view of the Senate.

I have been greatly impressed by what you have thus stated, and by what you have said on the same subject on former occasions. What has been done towards meeting the reproach of neglect of the Senate seemed all that was practicable at the time of the re-construction.

The matter which remains undisposed of, and, seemingly, but not really, unconsidered, is your own position and the claims which that position and your past great services establish. Far from being indifferent about this, I feel very deeply about it, and have conferred about it with my colleagues. I am conscious that you regard my coming here and remaining here as having interfered with your advancement. If that be so I have been an unwitting obstacle. I came most reluctantly and after often repeated assurances that I would not interfere with the prospects of any one else in public life. My staying here has not been the result of my own choice, or of my own interest. Far from it. I sincerely hope that in time I may be able to remove this feeling from your mind—or rather to remove the cause—which will be better.

I thank you very heartily for your congratulations and good wishes, and hope that we shall, together, be able to do much for our party and country and that you will have no reason to regret the sacrifices and trials of the past.

Wishing you a very happy New Year, and hoping to meet you soon to talk over these and other matters,

I remain,

dear Senator,

Sincerely yours,

(sgd) JNO. S. D. THOMPSON."

(I can only explain the words in the foregoing letter, viz :—"I am conscious you regard my coming here and staying here, &c., &c., &c.," by the impression I must have left on Sir John's mind from the earnest manner in which I urged him to accept the Chief Justiceship, that I regretted having helped to bring him to Ottawa, and wanted to get him out of the way, thoughts that never entered my mind for an instant.)

I publish the following notes from among a large number received from Sir John Thompson while he was Minister of Justice, as an

illustration of the consideration he extended to me on all occasions, and as further proof of my intimate relations with him. The first was written on the 25th March, 1889, and in connection with it I cannot help relating an incident, which more than once has forced itself on my recollection. I was breakfasting, a couple of days after the note was written, in the Senate restaurant at a rather late hour, with a gentleman for whom I have always entertained the highest respect, Mr. C. C. Colby, who, some months afterwards became President of the Privy Council. As the hour of 11 o'clock drew near, I rose from the table and told Mr. Colby that I must leave him, as Sir John Thompson had made an appointment to meet me on business at my room, at that hour. My friend looked incredulously at me, and said :—"Why, we members of the Commons are very well satisfied if we get any interview with a busy Minister after a no longer wait than half an hour in his ante room ; you must indeed be a favorite." He really looked as if he believed I was drawing on my imagination, and I never tried to remove the impression from his mind. But if this letter ever meet his eye, that impression will certainly be obliterated :—

"OFFICE OF THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE,

OTTAWA, Monday, 5.30 P.M.

MY DEAR MR. MILLER,

Your note has just this moment come to hand. It had been laid on my desk among other papers, and was unobserved. I would go at once to see you, but am up to my eyes in work on the Jesuit question, for which the remaining time before the debate will hardly suffice.

If you will permit me, I will call at your room at the Senate on Wednesday forenoon—say at 11.

Yours sincerely,

(sgd) JNO. S. D. THOMPSON."

The following note was written during the last session of Parliament, with dozens of others of the same kind during the intervening years :—

“OFFICE OF THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE,

OTTAWA, June 7th, 1894.

MY DEAR SENATOR,

Sir Charles showed me your letter. We will call over to the Senate to see you about it as soon as we can get a chance to leave the House.

Yours sincerely,

(sgd) JNO. S. D. THOMPSON.”

IV.

THE CRIMINAL CODE.

Mr. Hopkins is enthusiastic in his praise of Sir John Thompson in connection with the Criminal Code, and very properly so. It is undoubtedly the greatest legislative achievement of the distinguished jurist's career, and will be so regarded in coming years when the ephemeral questions of political controversy in which he figured are forgotten. I was chairman of the Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament to whom “the Bill respecting the Criminal Code” was referred, and what surprised me most during all our deliberations was that the hard-worked Minister and care-laden party leader missed only one of the many long sittings of the Committee, three or four weekly, and generally occupying all the forenoon, in the hot, sweltering, summer months, apparently as if there was nothing else to demand his attention — engage his thoughts—or bother his head. When the Code was in its last stage in the Senate, and out of all danger, I received the following note regarding it from Sir John, which may not be out of place here :—

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

JULY 4th, 1892.

MY DEAR SENATOR.—

I will ask Sir John Abbott to get the papers for me, so soon as he can do so without detriment to our application.

* * * * *

In case I should not have so good an opportunity before you leave, I beg to thank you again most heartily for your invaluable co-operation in advancing the Criminal Code as you have done. The task of getting it passed seemed almost a forlorn hope at one time, but you have placed success fairly within reach.

Believe me

Sincerely Yours,

(Sgd.) JNO. S. D. THOMPSON.

Whatever may have been the value of my friendly offices to Sir John Thompson—the extent of which these pages do not fully disclose—they were at any rate disinterested ; nor did I ever ask or receive any favor or benefit at his hands, either before or after he became a powerful minister. I think, however, it may be inferred from his letter of the 12th of January 1893, that he was not unmindful of my public services, or forgetful of his personal obligations to me ; and it was his misfortune, not his fault, that the sudden advent of ‘the stern decree’ compelled him to leave many cherished purposes unaccomplished, and some obligations of honor unfulfilled.

Airchat C. B.

August 15th, 1895.



